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**DeNUCCI SAYS TURNPIKE LOSES \$548,000 IN TOLLS
DUE TO "FAST LANE" OFFENDERS**

State Auditor Joe DeNucci, in an audit issued today, stated that the Massachusetts Turnpike Authority is losing an estimated \$548,000 in annual toll revenue due to drivers passing through the Fast Lane booths without paying the toll.

DeNucci's audit suggested that the Turnpike Authority reconsider its policy of giving only warnings to first-time violators of the electronic toll collection system, noting that the authority could offset the lost toll revenue by at least charging first-time offenders for the tolls that were not paid. Additionally, the audit noted, the Turnpike Authority could generate up to \$4.8 million in additional revenue by levying fines against first-time violators.

DeNucci's audit indicated that the Turnpike's two-year-old enforcement system is working well. However, under the Turnpike Authority's current policy, a written warning is sent out to first-time violators without a fine or a toll charge. Subsequent violations carry a \$50 fine.

The audit recognized that a grace period for first-time offenders made sense during the start-up phase, but pointed out that the Fast Lane program has now been in operation for four years and the public is very much aware of how it works.

According to DeNucci's audit, 192,102 warning notices were sent out in 2001 as well as another 169,319 citations to repeat offenders. However, the audit pointed out that the number of first-time offenses is increasing and could reach 200,000 this year.

DeNucci noted that there is an appeals process for those who believe they have been unfairly cited. He also suggested that consideration be given to phasing in fines, perhaps starting with a \$25 fine for first-time offenders and then going up to \$50 for subsequent violations.

"The Turnpike Authority has indicated it will review this issue as part of its ongoing assessment of the Fast Lane program," concluded DeNucci. "This program should operate in a manner that is fair to Fast Lane participants who comply with the law and pay their tolls."